

Answer two questions

- 1 In the following passage, from a travel website, the writer describes his first experience of a wedding in Mongolia.
- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage. [15]
- (b) The same writer visits another country. He puts an account of his experience of one of its national customs on the same website. Write the opening of the account (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the style and language of the original extract. [10]

Throughout the evening people came to warn me about themselves. They sat on the grass outside my tent, unburdening themselves with confessions. The following day would be difficult, they said. Weddings were boisterous occasions. People became unpredictable. They counselled me about particular individuals, then admitted that they themselves could be as bad as the next fellow. I would be wise to get away early before things got out of hand. 5

In the morning the groom and his supporters, a party of about seven or eight relations, set off to fetch the bride from her *ger*,<sup>1</sup> which lay some 15 miles away. An old Russian truck, the equivalent of the wedding Rolls-Royce, had been specially hired for the occasion. When they arrived, the groom would be obliged to search for his bride, who by tradition must hide from him. It would not be too difficult. The tradition is that she hides under a bed in the neighbouring *ger*. 10

While we waited for their return we were given breakfast in the newlyweds' *ger*. Over the past weeks it had been lovingly prepared by relations. It was like a show *ger* from Ideal Gers. Decorations included a poster of the inspirational figure of Batardene, the national wrestling champion, which had been hung in a prominent position above the marital bed. Biscuits, slabs of white cheese and boiled sweets had been arrayed on every surface in dizzy tiers like wedding cakes. On a low stool stood a mountainous plate of sheep parts, with the favoured cut, the great fatty tail, like a grey glacier on its summit. 15 20

Younger sisters hustled in and out making last-minute preparations. While we were at breakfast the first lookouts were posted to watch for the return of the truck bearing the wedding party from the bride's camp.

By mid-afternoon we were still waiting. Apparently a wedding breakfast would have been given to the groom and his accompanying party at the bride's camp, and complicated calculations were now performed concerning the number of miles to the bride's *ger*, divided by the speed of the truck combined with the probable duration of the breakfast, and finally multiplied by the estimated consumption of *arkhi*, a clear spirit distilled from milk. 25

At four o'clock a spiral of dust finally appeared beyond a distant ridge. When the truck drew up in front of the wedding *ger*, it was clear that the lavish hospitality of the bride's camp had been the cause of the delay. The back of the truck was crammed with wedding guests in such a state of dishevelled merriment that we had some difficulty persuading them to disembark. The bride's mother, apparently convinced that they were at the wrong *ger*, required four men to convey her to terra firma.<sup>2</sup> 30 35

The bride's elder sister, shrugging off all assistance, fell headfirst from the tailgate, bounced twice and came to rest, smiling, against a door post.

Once everyone was down from the truck, the bride and the groom stood respectfully to one side while the wedding party crowded into the new *ger*. The groom was tall and thin with a long, angular face. The bride, as round as he was linear, came up to his waist. Throughout the happy day they behaved like disappointed parties on a first date, never once meeting each other's eyes. 40

For the bride this was part of Mongolian tradition. She was meant to display a demure reluctance, deemed to be commensurate with feminine modesty. Her new husband was part of a wider tradition: the nervous, slightly shell-shocked bridegroom familiar in every culture. Their curious distance from the general jollity was made worse by the fact that they remained the only sober members of the wedding party. 45

Inside the newlyweds' *ger*, the two families took up positions on either side of the tent like opposing armies. Numbering 50 or 60 people, they were crowded together with the kind of intimacy usually reserved for the morning rush hour on the Tokyo subway. 50

The unexpected presence of me, a foreigner, was seen as a sign of good fortune for the success of the union and I had been squeezed into the lap of one of the groom's brothers. At my back were the sharp knees of a long, disapproving line of grannies and elderly aunts seated on cots. 55

<sup>1</sup>*ger*: dwelling (an elaborate tent)

<sup>2</sup>*terra firma*: solid ground